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A P P E A R A N C E S

ALSO PRESENT:

MR. JEREMY SHUGHART, Director of Admissions  
Fairfax County School Board  
Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

OFFICIAL U.S. COURT REPORTER:

MS. JULIE A. GOODWIN, CSR, RPR  
United States District Court  
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Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
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1 (SEPTEMBER 17, 2021, 10:03 A.M., OPEN COURT.)

2 THE COURTROOM DEPUTY: Civil Action Number 21-CV-296,  
3 *Coalition for TJ versus Fairfax County School Board, et al.*

4 Counsel, please note your appearances for the  
5 record.

6 MR. KIESER: Christopher Kieser for plaintiffs --  
7 plaintiff.

8 MS. REWARI: Good morning, Your Honor. Sona Rewari  
9 from Hunton Andrews Kurth for the defendant, and with me is  
10 Daniel Stefany, also from my firm, and Mr. Jeremy Shughart from  
11 the Fairfax County Public Schools. Mr. Shughart has provided a  
12 declaration in this case, and he is here to address any  
13 questions the Court may have.

14 THE COURT: All right.

15 MS. REWARI: Thank you.

16 MR. KIESER: And with me is Erin Wilcox, Alison Somin,  
17 and Glenn Roper, also for plaintiff.

18 THE COURT: All right.

19 This comes on on your motion.

20 MR. KIESER: Yes. Good morning, Your Honor, and I'll  
21 be brief. Chris Kieser for the Coalition for TJ.

22 When we were here in May with much the same body of  
23 evidence, this Court recognized the school board's overhaul of  
24 the admissions criteria for Thomas Jefferson High School was  
25 designed to effect the racial composition of the school. Since

1 that hearing, and the denial of the first preliminary junction  
2 motion, we learned an important new data point. The first year  
3 under the challenge plan, the Asian-American proportion of the  
4 admitted class at TJ fell by more than a quarter.  
5 Asian-Americans received almost 60 fewer seats at TJ, even  
6 though FCPS doled out 60 additional offers.

7           The new data confirmed that not only was the plan  
8 designed to effect the racial composition of the school, it  
9 succeeded in doing so to the great detriment of atrium --  
10 Asian-American students. That purpose and effect means the  
11 Coalition is likely to succeed on the merits of its equal  
12 protection claim.

13           The Court declined to issue a preliminary  
14 injunction last time, as far as we understand, because it -- it  
15 was confident that -- Your Honor was confident we could reach a  
16 final decision in this case before an injunction would be  
17 necessary for the class of 2026. But with the admissions  
18 process scheduled to go into effect just -- begin in just over  
19 a month, on October 25th, a preliminary injunction is necessary  
20 now to preserve the status quo, the last uncontested status  
21 between the parties. It's far from guaranteed that a final  
22 decision on the merits would come early enough to provide  
23 effective relief for RA and the class of 2026, as the Coalition  
24 recognizes that the board's interest in not disrupting the  
25 established admissions process increase once the process

1 begins.

2 Preliminary relief now would avoid that problem.

3 And the --

4 THE COURT: Now, I understand your concern, but  
5 this -- the final pretrial conference is set for the end of  
6 October. I can give you a January trial date, so we can have  
7 this decided in January.

8 MR. KIESER: Your Honor, that -- that would be, of  
9 course -- I mean, we would not object to that, of course, but I  
10 think even then at that point by January the board's interest  
11 in -- in not overhauling the -- the entire admissions process  
12 that started in October would perhaps make it difficult for the  
13 Court to issue an order, a prohibitory injunction enjoining the  
14 board's actions from last fall and essentially requiring the  
15 board to go back to the 2024 -- the class of 2024 admissions  
16 process when the current process had already started. And  
17 the -- and I would note that the current process has different  
18 eligibility requirements, so there are some people who would be  
19 eligible to apply under the old process who are not eligible.

20 THE COURT: But if some decision is made in January,  
21 that gives plenty of time for the process to be straightened  
22 out, doesn't it?

23 MR. KIESER: I mean, I -- I would recog -- I would  
24 just note that as time goes on it makes -- it's very -- much  
25 more difficult --

1 THE COURT: Well, I'm sure they're going to argue  
2 that, but I -- it seems to me in the posture we're in that kind  
3 of falls on deaf ears. I -- this is going to come up very  
4 quickly. And if it's determined that this process has been  
5 discriminatory, it seems to me there's plenty of time to change  
6 it.

7 MR. KIESER: Well, Your Honor, we would submit that  
8 the best time to change the process, at least for the class of  
9 2026, would be before the process begins, and that is within  
10 the next five weeks. If we were to do it in January, the  
11 logistical issues that the board mentions in their brief would  
12 only increase, and the likelihood that the Court could order  
13 effective relief by the end of January would be much less.  
14 So I --

15 THE COURT: But the board's on notice. They  
16 understand that we're trying this case, and we don't know what  
17 the outcome is going to be yet, so they've got to be prepared  
18 for that, don't they?

19 MR. KIESER: I'm -- that's certainly true, Your Honor,  
20 but that's -- the same situation has been -- the same situation  
21 has existed since Your Honor denied the motion to dismiss in  
22 May, and yet even with this preliminary injunction motion, they  
23 make the same arguments about overhauling the admissions  
24 process at a late date. So I think those arguments continue  
25 even though I think the board's been on notice --

1 THE COURT: Well, those arguments are always going to  
2 be there, but it seems like that I'm in a -- in the same  
3 position that I am -- that I was before. I mean, what kind of  
4 disruption is it going to cause for me to give a preliminary  
5 injunction now? I've been in the same position I was before,  
6 it seems to me.

7 MR. KIESER: Well, I would submit, Your Honor, that a  
8 preliminary injunction now for the class of the 2026 process  
9 that is yet to begin is much less disruptive than say had you  
10 ordered a preliminary injunction in May for the old admissions  
11 process -- for the admissions process from last year, which was  
12 almost complete.

13 At this point, you could issue an order and --  
14 and -- and there would be ample time to prepare to change the  
15 process for anything you might order. Whereas if you do it in  
16 January, that might not be the case. And if -- I think if the  
17 Court -- as you recognized in May, that disruption increases as  
18 time goes on.

19 So, we would submit that a preliminary injunction  
20 now would minimize the disruption and allow the Court to order  
21 a prohibitory injunction that goes into effect five weeks  
22 before the -- the admissions process begins. And that's --  
23 that's our position on that. I mean, I understand if that's --

24 THE COURT: I understand your position.

25 MR. KIESER: And I guess, you know, as far as the --



1 the remaining factors, I mean, we think that -- we demonstrated  
2 that at least one Coalition member will suffer irreparable harm  
3 because if the Coalition is likely to succeed on the merits,  
4 then the -- the Coalition member's child will have to compete  
5 on an unequal playing field, and that isn't -- is the equal  
6 protection injury under *Parents Involved* and *Northeastern*  
7 *Florida*, so that's sufficient to satisfy the irreparable harm  
8 argument.

9           And then as far as the public interest and the  
10 balance of the equities, this case is against the government  
11 defendants, so those -- those -- and it's a constitutional  
12 case, so those factors merge. And generally speaking, the  
13 Fourth Circuit in *Legend Night Club* and in *Newsome* has waived  
14 the public interest in enforcing constitutional rights  
15 significantly more than government arguments to -- that they  
16 will be subject to hardship due to an injunction.

17           So we would submit that a preliminary injunction  
18 is -- all four *Winter* factors are satisfied and the preliminary  
19 injunction is -- is appropriate.

20           THE COURT: All right.

21           MR. KIESER: Thank you.

22           MS. REWARI: Good morning.

23           Your Honor, as you've recognized, you expressly  
24 ruled on this issue back in May, and there are really no  
25 grounds for reconsideration that are presented in the papers.

1 There's a suggestion that the Court miscalculated the timetable  
2 for this case. And when we were here in May, there wasn't even  
3 a scheduling order, so no one could have expected that this  
4 case would be decided by October.

5 And the schedule even back in May was known because  
6 Mr. Shughart supplied a similar declaration in May that  
7 explained that historically the old process would start in  
8 early September in order to be able to be completed in six  
9 months. And of course, then Your Honor issued a scheduling  
10 order in early June, and it showed the discovery cutoff was  
11 going to be October 15th. The parties submitted a joint  
12 discovery plan in which they sequenced discovery to be  
13 completed by October 15th. There was no request for expedited  
14 discovery or, you know, request to change the schedule at that  
15 time.

16 And we are now a month from the close of discovery,  
17 and we don't have any new evidence here that would warrant  
18 reconsideration other than the outcome of the last admission  
19 cycle, which I'll address because it doesn't show a  
20 disproportionate impact. But that -- that is the only ground  
21 that they have stated.

22 So, there's no way that anybody could have thought  
23 this was going to be decided by October, even when we were here  
24 in May. And the -- the rationale that we have the admissions  
25 results of the current process also doesn't support a

1 consideration. The last time we were here the Coalition argued  
2 for an injunction based on its own gloomy prediction that  
3 Asian-American students would comprise only 31 percent of the  
4 class of 2025, and that prediction came nowhere close to  
5 reality.

6 The results are in, and the proportion of  
7 Asian-American students in the class of 2025 is almost double  
8 that prediction. It was 54 percent, even though their  
9 proportion of the applicant pool was lower than it was the year  
10 before. They're still the majority of students, and  
11 Asian-American students have a larger share of the admitted  
12 class than their share of the applicant pool. So they have an  
13 even weaker argument now than they did back in May as to why  
14 the preliminary injunction would be warranted.

15 And last time the Coalition offered two  
16 declarations from two parents: One who had a child who was  
17 applying as an 8th grader, and one who had a child that was a  
18 7th grader. And they have the same two parents' declarations  
19 again.

20 Now, tellingly, the parent who had the 8th grader  
21 is not saying that 8th grader didn't get in. That parent is  
22 now saying, I'm worried about my 7th grader a year from now not  
23 getting in. That child is not even eligible to apply for this  
24 and so wouldn't be affected by an injunction.

25 The second parent, the one who had a 7th grader

1 last year, is now saying, well, my 8th grader is going to  
2 apply. But -- and he talks about the high qualifications of  
3 his 8th grader, but there's no showing that that child is  
4 unlikely to get in absent an injunction. In fact, the school  
5 attended by that child had the highest number of students  
6 admitted in -- in the class of 2025, and so there is no changed  
7 circumstance that would warrant reconsideration here.

8 And, you know, we are talking as if it would be  
9 possible to completely revert to the 2019 process now. And as  
10 we pointed in our papers, and there's no dispute here, that the  
11 old process was based on three standardized tests, two of which  
12 are no longer available from the vendor. No one can get them.  
13 They're not being offered for 8th graders at all this year.

14 And so if the Court were to order a preliminary  
15 injunction, someone would have to figure out what is the  
16 process going to look like because we cannot use the 2019  
17 process. Are there going to be standardized tests? What tests  
18 will those be? What scores will matter? How will we use those  
19 scores? All of that is -- are matters of educational policy.  
20 There's no expert to advise the Court on how to pick those. Is  
21 the board on an injunction supposed to now make those decisions  
22 in spring, this news on thousands upon thousands of  
23 unsuspecting 8th graders who are expecting for the Court -- for  
24 the board to follow the old process?

25 Mr. Shughart's declaration explains that last time

1 the School Board went through this three years ago when they  
2 had to switch tests because the tests they were using was  
3 discontinued by the vendor. The process took over a year.  
4 There was significant, significant community engagement: Lots  
5 of committees, lots of groups, lots of parent input. Lots of  
6 school administrator, school teacher input.

7           And so the idea that we could have an injunction  
8 today that would say, go pick some new tests, spring it on  
9 students who haven't been preparing, who had no idea that a  
10 standardized test could be coming, who are looking at the  
11 regulation that's been on the books to the public for months  
12 now saying that this is going to be the process, would be in a  
13 public interest, I think strains credulity, Your Honor, because  
14 this is not -- you know, they've said the balance of hardships  
15 and public interests merge when the government is a defendant,  
16 but in -- in many of those cases in terms of balancing the  
17 hardships, you're looking at is this an action that affects one  
18 person, the plaintiff, or the plaintiff's group, or are you  
19 enjoining something that could have consequences for students  
20 or for, you know, citizens beyond the people who are suing, and  
21 this would have significant adverse consequences for the  
22 children in Northern Virginia.

23           Fairfax County Public Schools is the defendant in  
24 this case, but the school that we're talking about is a school  
25 that is attended by students from five localities. The

1 counties of Loudoun, Arlington, Prince William, the City of  
2 Falls Church all send their students, and then we also have  
3 private schools.

4 Mr. Shughart 's declaration noted that last year  
5 we had 130 students from 130 schools apply to TJ admission, and  
6 so this impact would impact all of those students who are  
7 relying on the process that -- that is in the regulation.

8 And, you know, I understand that, as Your Honor  
9 pointed out, if the Court were to find discrimination and enter  
10 an injunction, all of these questions would have to be sorted  
11 out. But what is the sense in deciding them now and then  
12 re-deciding them if there's a different conclusion a few months  
13 from now?

14 You know, plaintiffs have read a lot into Your  
15 Honor's comments from the bench. Last time the same sentence  
16 from your -- from the transcript is quoted five times in two  
17 briefs. And, you know, I've looked carefully at what Your  
18 Honor said, and it's clear to me from the transcript that you  
19 were addressing the allegations of -- of what is alleged in the  
20 case and not making a pronouncement from the bench on a motion  
21 to dismiss that -- that this is a --

22 THE COURT: Well, you're correct about that. I've  
23 made no findings of fact in this case at all, other than the  
24 findings that I made in regard to the temporary restraining  
25 order that I looked at initially.

1 MS. REWARI: Yes, and that's how I read your remarks,  
2 and that's how we received your remarks. And so we expect that  
3 there will be a full decision on the merits in this case, and  
4 if the -- Your Honor is able to take us in January, we're --  
5 we're -- you know, we're happy to have it tried in January, but  
6 creating two rounds of uncertainty for students thousands upon  
7 thousands of students who are impacted by this.

8 And -- and I would also note that this is a process  
9 that has lots of components. Right? There's elimination of  
10 the hundred dollar application fee. There's no -- there's  
11 nothing about that that is racially discriminatory on its face.  
12 There's no evidence that's -- that was intended to advantage or  
13 disadvantage any group.

14 You have to be very cynical to say that that is a  
15 proxy for race. There's no evidence that that's a proxy for  
16 race. So you could have a process that -- that -- you know,  
17 even if the Court were to rule adversely against the School  
18 Board in January that says, you can keep that elimination of  
19 the fee, there's nothing wrong with that, and that has a huge  
20 impact. This year's class has 25 percent of economically  
21 disadvantage students, a number that's never been seen at TJ  
22 which has been historically very, very low, and nothing like  
23 the student population that you see in Northern Virginia.

24 So this has had a huge impact on the students who  
25 are eligible. And for the Court to now enjoin it would --

1 would have terrible consequences.

2           There's -- you know, there's another part of the  
3 plan. For example, there's also the lack of -- you know, the  
4 absence of teacher recommendations. Again, is that a proxy for  
5 race? There's no argument how that's a proxy for race.

6           There's a one -- there's -- the board chose a plan  
7 that is guaranteed to provide seats for eligible candidates  
8 from each middle school in Fairfax County. For the first time  
9 in at least 15 years, the TJ class of 2025 has students from  
10 every single middle -- public middle school in Fairfax County,  
11 26 of them.

12           Again, there's no argument, there's no evidence  
13 that that is a proxy for race. But in Mr. Dec --  
14 Mr. Shughart's declaration shows that historically the lion's  
15 share, more than 87 percent of the seats went to 8 out of 26  
16 middle schools. And while the plaintiffs have argued -- or  
17 plaintiff has argued, well, Asian-American students are  
18 clustered in just a few -- a few schools, we've provided  
19 evidence in our papers that's not true. The number of the  
20 schools they pick look a lot like other schools in terms of the  
21 number of Asian-American students, the proportion of  
22 Asian-American students in the population that have  
23 historically sent few, if any, students to TJ.

24           And, Your Honor, you received a brief from a number  
25 of amici that echo this point, and, in fact, show that there



1 are large segments of the Asian-American, to the extent you're  
2 going to call Asian-Americans a single community, there are  
3 segments of that community or sub-groups within the  
4 Asian-American community that have benefitted from these  
5 changes, and they would support these changes. So the idea  
6 that the -- the plaintiff here represents the interest of  
7 Asian-American students is one that we would not agree with.

8           There's -- there's also -- you know, we disagree on  
9 the likelihood of success on the merits. And I'm happy to  
10 address it if the Court wants to, but, you know, failure to  
11 meet any of the elements under *Winter* requires denial of the  
12 injunction. And I think the balance of hardships and the  
13 public interest here strongly disfavor an injunction.

14           THE COURT: All right.

15           MS. REWARI: Thank you.

16           THE COURT: Anything you want to respond to?

17           MR. KIESER: Your Honor, I would make it just a couple  
18 of points because I think on -- oh, sorry with the mask.

19           I think on the balance of equities and -- and the  
20 public interest, we've -- we've sort of covered those points.  
21 And -- and our position is still that, you know, in January  
22 there may not be any way to -- to award effective relief for  
23 the class of 2026 at TJ because of the fact that the process  
24 will have gone all the way through at that point, or almost all  
25 the way through.

1           And, you know, my friend on the other side talks  
2 about, you know, the fact that they would have to find these  
3 two new tests, but that -- that's going to be an issue in  
4 January too, so -- and maybe even more difficult to do that in  
5 January when you need to tell people by June whether they got  
6 into TJ, so an injunction now would at least make the process a  
7 little more smooth. And at least -- I mean, as we've talked  
8 about, they've been on notice since May, so it's been what now,  
9 six months that there's been a possibility that this might be  
10 enjoined at some point? An injunction now would at least, you  
11 know, give some clarity for the students who are applying  
12 before the application process begins.

13           I just want to also address the disparate impact  
14 point because I think under their -- their theory that the drop  
15 from 73 percent to 54 percent isn't a disparate impact. It is  
16 essentially saying that you can benchmark a racial -- racially  
17 balanced class and say, well, as long as they're still  
18 performing above that, that racial balance, whether it be the  
19 proportion of students in Fairfax County Public Schools as a  
20 whole or the applicant pool, then -- then the process or the  
21 board's actions were not discriminatory. But as the --  
22 especially as the order that we submitted as Exhibit 2 to the  
23 reply brief, the *AFEF versus Montgomery County Board of*  
24 *Education* explains, that's not the proper standard for  
25 disparate impact under a -- in an *Arlington Heights* case. It's

1 the effect of the actual decision.

2           So, here we have, you know, six years in a row  
3 where there's only one year where the Asian-American proportion  
4 of students at TJ was below 70 percent, and now it's 54  
5 percent. That's a significant drop regardless of previous  
6 projections. I mean, I think everyone would acknowledge that  
7 it's very -- it was very difficult to project the outcome of  
8 what would happen here because of the holistic factors that go  
9 into evaluation, and so the 54 percent, which is in line with  
10 the superintendent's prediction for his Merit Lottery Proposal  
11 still represents a more than a quarter decline in the --  
12 compared to the previous two years, class of 2024 and the class  
13 of 2023. And any -- and their -- under their theory,  
14 essentially as long as Asian-Americans were doing better than  
15 the -- than the racial balance of the applicant pool, then  
16 there could be no discriminatory intent. And I don't think  
17 that that's the proper reading of *Arlington Heights*, *Feeney*,  
18 and *McCrary*.

19           But if this comes down to the -- the balance of the  
20 equities, I think our position is essentially the same as  
21 before that, that effective relief has to happen now, and in  
22 January there's no guarantee that there could be effective  
23 relief for this -- this class. I mean, the Court could order  
24 relief for the -- for the subsequent classes at that point  
25 and -- and we would certainly hope that the Court could order

1 relief for 2026 of that -- the class of 2026 at that time, but  
2 we would just submit that it would be more difficult to do so.  
3 And so then an injunction now would solve that problem.

4 Thank you, Your Honor.

5 THE COURT: All right. I understand your position,  
6 but I believe I'm in the same position that I am before. I  
7 believe that the -- my entering of a preliminary injunction at  
8 this time may cause more harm than good and might cause more  
9 harm than leaving things alone. It certainly looks like it  
10 would to me.

11 I mean, we can try this case in January and get a  
12 decision. It seems to me that that's plenty of time to get  
13 corrected whatever needs to be corrected, if that's warranted  
14 from the findings after the trial of the case.

15 So your motion for a preliminary injunction will be  
16 denied.

17 All right.

18 MR. KIESER: Your Honor, we did want to talk quickly  
19 about the pretrial, about the date for the pretrial conference.

20 THE COURT: Go ahead.

21 MR. KIESER: We have a conflict for the current date,  
22 and I think we've -- we talked about October 28th as a possible  
23 change for that. Would that be possible to move it back to  
24 October 28th?

25 THE COURT: Well, I'll do it on a Friday for you.

1 What's the date of the conflict?

2 MR. KIESER: It's currently the 21st. We can move it  
3 to the -- yeah, we can move it to the --

4 MS. REWARI: Your Honor, excuse me. I'm sorry. I'm  
5 scheduled to attend the Boyd-Graves Conference in Virginia on  
6 the 29th, so I wouldn't be able to do the 29th.

7 THE COURT: Well, let me look here just a minute.  
8 Maybe we can -- does that include the 28th too?

9 MS. REWARI: No, it does not, Your Honor.

10 THE COURT: What about October -- are you available on  
11 the 22nd, Friday the 22nd?

12 MR. KIESER: No, ours is the 20th through the 22nd.  
13 We're -- we have a firm-wide retreat that we all have to be  
14 there.

15 THE COURT: Oh.

16 MR. KIESER: So it's the 20th through the 22nd.

17 THE COURT: Well, I can do it for you -- well, you  
18 can't do it on the 28th though. You want to do it the 25th or  
19 the 26th?

20 MR. KIESER: We can do the 28th.

21 MS. REWARI: Yes, Your Honor, I can do the 28th as  
22 well. I just can't do the 29th.

23 THE COURT: Oh, you can do the 28th too. Okay.

24 MS. REWARI: Yes, yes, I can do the 28th.

25 THE COURT: All right. We'll move it to the 28th --

1 MR. KIESER: Okay. Thank you.

2 THE COURT: -- at 10:00 o'clock.

3 MR. KIESER: Thank you, Your Honor.

4 MS. REWARI: Thank you.

5 THE COURT: All right. Anything else?

6 MR. KIESER: Not at this time, no.

7 THE COURT: All right. Thank you.

8 We'll adjourn until Monday morning at 10:00  
9 o'clock.

10 THE LAW CLERK: All rise.

11 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AT 10:31 A.M.)

12 -oOo-

13

14 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT )  
15 EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA )

16 I, JULIE A. GOODWIN, Official Court Reporter for  
17 the United States District Court, Eastern District of Virginia,  
18 do hereby certify that the foregoing is a correct transcript  
19 from the record of proceedings in the above matter, to the best  
20 of my ability.

21 I further certify that I am neither counsel for,  
22 related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in  
23 which this proceeding was taken, and further that I am not  
24 financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the  
25 action.

Certified to by me this 5TH day of OCTOBER, 2021.

21

22

23

24

25

/s/  
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